

He did much to purify the stage, but did not strengthen the position of the Church. The bitter struggle between the Church and the Nonconformists in Queen Anne's reign, which ended in the passing of the Occasional Conformity Act and the Schism Act, secured the political privileges of the Church at the expense of its national character.

Macaulay's account of the country gentlemen is open to the same objections as his account of the clergy. It is exaggerated, it is indiscriminating, and accuracy is sometimes sacrificed to rhetorical effect. At the period of which he wrote the class as a whole was much larger than it is now ; the land was divided amongst more owners, and large properties were fewer. Gregory King estimated that the landed gentry consisted of about 16,000 families, and the class included rich knights and baronets, whose ancestors for generations had represented the county, and the ' little gentlemen of two hundred a year ' that a dramatist laughs at.¹ The level of culture varied as greatly as the average amount of wealth. The smaller gentry were naturally less cultivated than those who could afford to spend liberally on the education of their children, and to travel. In the remoter parts of the country the gentry were less educated and less civilised than those who lived nearer

to the capital. In the picture which Macaulay draws of the class as a whole these shades of difference are suppressed; he generalises too much from the lower half of the class and makes no adequate allowance for the large number of educated and intelligent men it contained. ' From this description/ he says, ' *it* might be supposed that the English esquire of the seventeenth century did not materially differ from a rustic miller or alehouse keeper of our

¹ Davenant, Works, ii. 184.